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Bush's new woes

WHITE HOUSE press secretary Ron Nessen struck pay dirt when he laid the blame for the opposition to George Bush's nomination for director of the Central Intelligence Agency on "people running for president and looking for headlines."

The pity is that his boss, President Ford, supplied these "people running for president" with material for their headlines by declining to eliminate Bush, along with Secretary of Defense nominee Donald Rumsfeld, from consideration as his vice presidential running mate next year.

Bush himself has no illusions about his political prospects while in the job. He agreed with The Times Herald immediately after his appointment was announced that it was a "political graveyard." "It has to be to do the job right," he said.

IN FACT, everything he said in a telephone interview from Peking evidenced his awareness of the necessity to remain above politics—even to the point of an inferred disagreement with Ford that he would be viable as a 1976 vice presidential possibility.

"I'm taking a totally new direction now," he said.

"Maybe they think I don't want to be serious (in the CIA job)," he said.

"I have to put that (politics) out of my mind. I have to give the proper assurances . . ." he said.

The following day, he was quoted in

a Reuters dispatch from Peking as saying he was not sure taking the CIA job ended his chances for a political career forever. He was clearly talking about a future beyond the CIA but it was a mistake all the same.

Reporters anxious to ax the nomination and politicians anxious for publicity managed to ignore his saying in the same Reuters dispatch that anyone who thought he could be picked from the CIA and be made the 1976 vice presidential nominee was "hallucinating."

SEN. FRANK Church (D-Idaho) went so far as to twist the statements via Reuters to imply that Bush expects to be in the running for veep in '76.

That Church himself is running for president from his position as chairman of the Senate Select Committee investigating the CIA is no longer in doubt. Not only is he beginning to use the committee for partisan attack (an advantage Ford foolishly allowed him) but, according to insiders, he is pushing the committee to finish its job by March at the latest so he can formally announce his candidacy.

All of this is separate and apart from real concern over the Bush nomination at another level of government. The professional ranks of the CIA itself are said to have grave misgivings about the ability of the agency to overcome involvement in Watergate and foreign assassination plots and re-establish itself as a vital intelligence force under the direction of a politician.

All that can be said in this regard is that Bush was put down as a nice lightweight whose nomination degraded the position when he was named U.S. representative to the United Nations in 1971. The same people who denounced the appointment when it was made praised Bush's performance when he left the U.N. to become Republican party chairman in 1973.

Two years in the U.N.'s hotbed of international intrigue and a year in China, dealing, among other things, as intermediary in the Cambodia crisis, did not leave Bush totally devoid of knowledge of foreign intelligence.

THE SUPPOSED danger in a former political party chairman succeeding to a sensitive and nonpolitical post is belied by onetime Democratic party chairman Cordell Hull's career as Secretary of State.

If Bush isn't Cordell Hull, he also isn't Larry O'Brien.

Whether he used good sense in accepting the nomination is open to question.

(Margaret Mayer is chief of The Times-Herald Washington Bureau.)